

# THE RANCH(ER)

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## ABSTRACT

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*THE RANCH(ER)* is a thesis project to fulfill the requirements of an MFA degree in visual fine-arts. This project focused on exploring my connection between the land, the ranch and its tools, and generations of ancestors living and working a small family ranch. I give voice to the seldom-vocal rancher and the isolation, hardships, and tenderness of ranch life. I have chosen as subjects for this exhibition objects that are utilitarian and are items woven into the cultural fabric of ranchers and their families. They are icons of generational identity. Rather than creating purely traditional functional objects such as cups and bowls, I've created conceptual pieces that emphasize the intangible connection between utilitarian objects and their users, as well as the objects' roles in its customary position. By removing the items from their original context, I point to the context of function and utility: a life of use and work. Clay is the primary material used to create this installation to tell a universal story. The ceramic and sculptural pieces were exhibited to the public as an installation in the University of Alaska Fairbanks Fine Arts Gallery in the Fine Art Complex, Room 312, from November 2-20, 2020. The artist's public presentation was given through an open Zoom meeting on Friday, November 13, 2020. The project report summarizes the examination and investigations involved in the development of the project.

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# 1 | THE RANCH(ER)

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*The Ranch(er)*. Here is a place with a rich heritage of family, culture, dedication, hard work, and a bit of nostalgia. This is not unique to only my family's place. You will see it on almost every ranch or farm if you take a moment to look. The artifacts of old parts can be seen stored or thrown nearby for that one moment in time where it may have the opportunity to come back to life in a new way. You may see neighbors stopped in the middle of the road checking in on one another, and I would bet my last dollar that the weather was the first topic in their discussion. Take a close look at the hands of anyone working on a ranch. These are just a glimpse of what is there.

As an only child of ranchers from the western United States, I chose to share my unique experiences of a lifestyle that is slowly fading with others who may not have had the opportunities to experience the isolation or the breathtaking wonders that can be found on a family ranch in this country that I love. Ranching goes back in my family for generations. Working on a family ranch is where I learned who I was and where I come from. I grew up in the heart of the Colorado Rockies and have always had a love for the mountains and the quiet solitude I found there. There is a similar experience when making pottery. Alone in the studio, feeling the chill of a soft mound of earth moving through my hands, and I think about the length of time it takes for the earth to break down to become the clay<sup>1</sup> that I will use to make a form. Choosing ceramics is a way for me to stay connected to my roots.

As with life on the ranch, there is a rich history of dedication, work, and life within the ceramics world that parallels these characteristics. Choosing ceramics also meant that I got to stay connected to the earth. The following sentiment has stuck with me for many years, "Tend to the earth, and it

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<sup>1</sup> Nora K.Foley, "Environmental Characteristics of Clays and Clay Mineral Deposits," *Environmental Characteristics of Clays and Clay Mineral Deposits* (U.S. Geological Survey, April 1, 2009), <https://pubs.usgs.gov/info/clays/>. Robin Hopper, *Functional Pottery: Form and Aesthetic in Pots of Purpose*, 2nd ed. (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2000).

keeps you grounded. It teaches you responsibility, brings out the nurturer in you, gives you pride in what you do, gives back, and makes connections that can last a lifetime.” This thesis is about the objects that have been used, the relationships that we have with them, and to answer the in-depth question of utility and what it means to be useful. I was once told that it was interesting that I have selected dirt to talk about dirt, and this made me realize that I could use clay as an allegory. Within these pages, it may reference the people, the place, or the tool.

## 2 | QUESTIONS OF UTILITY: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE USEFUL

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Beginning this graduate program as a studio-potter making functional wares; I had envisioned that I would exhibit utilitarian pottery as my thesis project. Intending to explore utilitarian works and the artists that made them was my first objective. As a first-generation college student, I never thought that I would get this far. Graduate school was a new door opening up for me. I was grateful for the opportunity to walk through this door to begin a new journey.

After introductions and space assignments in the graduate studio, I came in to try to generate ideas that would be explored through this program for my thesis project. I sat alone in this space for several hours, waiting for the ideas to flood in. Nothing. Days later, nothing. I cleaned the studio, named the kiln, dreamed of my own studio, yet no ideas came. Finding an old textbook to study the many pots from history and drawing out a timeline of where pot forms came from in my sketchbook. I determined what form and characteristics were preferable, what connected with me the most and even wrote about why I preferred one form over another. The looming question was, “Where to begin?” My committee chair and professor, Jim Brashear, asked, “...what concept or idea was I going to focus on?” Needing to set some parameters for myself because this could become so daunting or all-consuming, and I know that I would be sucked down the proverbial rabbit hole.

1. It needed to be something dear to me; I had to love what I was doing.
2. I determined that I needed to connect to what I was making.
3. I wanted to tell a unique story

I went to the gallery space where my exhibition show would be held. I had to make decisions that would guide my outcomes so I could tell my story visually. Observing how people would step in the gallery’s doorway, glance at the work on the four walls then leave encouraged me to process how to

change this space. Perrin Sullivan was right when she said that your eye is drawn to the EXIT when you look in the doors. I began to formulate a plan that would pique the audience's interest to come in.

After many months of processing and discussions with my committee, it finally hit me—a door. More specifically, barn doors. This would be a visual cue when entering the room that the audience would be changing location. I REALLY wanted barn doors made out of clay. It needed to be placed at the beginning as an invitation for the viewer; to walk in from your world and step into mine. Western iconography and ranching were used to guide my direction.

From my many conversations with the older generations of family, I determined that I wanted my barn door color to be a traditional red. Still, as research, going back to the family's trusted source, the *Farmers' Almanac*. For some cultures, red is the color of luck or welcome, but it came from the necessity of their frugality for early agrarians. A mixture of skimmed milk, lime, and red iron oxide makes an armored-like coating to protect the wood. Beginning the process to make this come together, I tried many methods of making a barn door and had many failed attempts. Therefore, the door was one of the last pieces to be completed.

Making objects and not seeing the change and growth was discouraging. I continued to make the same type of work that I had already made in earlier years. I explored grains and seeds for some time, going as far as embedding grains into my clay, firing it, and observing the voids. It was fascinating to me that in critiques with classmates and committee members, this avenue always took on such a negative connotation of how others viewed the world I came from. My response was to shift my direction to look at the seeds' form and explored various sizes, shapes, and textures and the multiple possibilities that I could see. I worked with glaze colors to recreate the warm, earthy, golden

browns. I found that what I was making was interesting, but it did not feel like the work I wanted to continue to explore this avenue.

I went with sculpture-like forms but more thrown and altered—then worked with the shape of hames and collars. Finally, moving to throwing and altering shapes to make landscapes on trays, mugs, and bowls. While there were successes, it never felt entirely like me or my style.

I wrote to other artists. I made so many connections and built an amazing network. I recalled a visiting artist discussing how networking is one of the most-essential things that I would walk away with after this program. I find this so true.

Physically, I struggled after being diagnosed with a severe case of arthritis from T6 to S5 in my vertebra. The next year I got a concussion and fractured my hip. These factors compounded, making it difficult to concentrate, focus, think clearly, and physically work. I took a step away from throwing for a few weeks, finding that it was difficult to express my needs in the committee meetings. I searched for what my direction should be. I cowboyed- up and kept moving forward. I had dreamed of being a graduate, the first in my family to get a degree. I may not have achieved my goal of graduating with honors, but I did find what matters. For me, it is to focus on God and my family. I intend to use pottery to point others to find their spiritual connection.

Spirituality is vital to me. Classroom conversations about it were enlightening. I can empathize with why many individuals run from it, have been left with a bitter taste, or are just numb to it. But for me, the church is a hospital for broken people that know and need their creator to fix them.

Writing scriptures on my pottery (Image 2- 2) started in 2011. Teresa Shannon encouraged me to



Image 2- 2: Close-up images of Wendy Connelley's work showing script and sprig inscription

research others who have also put lettering on ceramics, which led me to discover an Arabic Bowl in the MET<sup>2</sup>. It struck a chord with me because they, too, inscribed their work with PROVERBS.



Image 2- 1: Close up; Bowl with Arabic Inscription: inscribed Proverbs, The MET, 10<sup>th</sup> Century

(Image 2- 1) An example found was this specific bowl that reads, “Planning before work protects you from regret; prosperity and peace.”<sup>3</sup>

Before starting the grad program, creating small luminaries was a pleasure of mine. I returned to exploring piercing and incising various forms that I had thrown on the wheel to see how the light

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<sup>2</sup> Maryam Ekhtiar, “Bowl with Arabic Inscription 10th Century,” metmuseum.org (The MET, 2011), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451802>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

would bend, reflect and illuminate. Light has so many nuances—it removes the dark, conveys hope, suggests safety, signals truth, and indicates inspiration or influence. Looking for more complex forms,<sup>4</sup> selecting the pitcher as an element in my show was easy. It is one of the more complex structures, and it casts more interesting shadows and highlights. Next came reviewing what patterns to cut from this form that I was choosing to repurpose. Using a radial design (this would connect to other pieces in the show) made me look at the space above and below its placement. Then uniting the broken and mended thought into the handle, there is a feeling of success with this series.

For me processing the question about what makes ‘ceramics’ a particular category of things worthy of this special attention was integral. During one conversation, me and my friend, an archaeologist, threw out ideas about the possible answers that came to mind. One is purely pragmatic: Ceramics are often one of the most abundant categories in an archaeological find. The second determination is more conceptual: ceramics are considered a key feature of ‘human material culture’ because of what they represent in economic, technological, and evolutionary terms.

Suppose we think about this—the innovation of taking the plastic medium of clay and marrying it with pyro-technology to produce a permanent, durable object. This appears to me to be a mark on the revolutionary stage—the Neolithic Era, or moving from hunters and gathers into the development of modern human thought and practice, forming with agriculture and stationary lifestyles. This is like a TRIPLE CROWN— the era-changing innovations that were happening.

In the fall of 2018, I read *1 Peter 4:10*. The guidance jumped off the page at me. “*Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God.*”<sup>5</sup> It’s what I do, what I

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<sup>4</sup> Pete Pinnell: *Thoughts on Cups, Interview: The Cup: The Intimate Object V Exhibition at the Charlie Cummings Gallery* (YouTube: Charlie Cummings, 2011), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WChFMMzLHV8>.

<sup>5</sup> “1 Peter 4:10: New English Translation (NET),” Blue Letter Bible 1Peter4:10 (NET) (Blue Letter Bible), accessed October 18, 2018, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/net/1pe/4/10/s\\_1155010](https://www.blueletterbible.org/net/1pe/4/10/s_1155010).

know, and my direction came to life. My sketchbooks began to fill quickly. I spent a great deal of time with them. Jim Brashear had often stated that paper was a good start to work ideas out. There is much truth in that. I worked out many ideas, even removing a bunch that simply didn't connect together at this time. **Great ideas**—just not all fitting into my concept of 'serve,' 'use,' or 'work.' Or at least what I had wanted. For me, learning to see the story that each pot told was a bit more difficult. It is sometimes hard to get the feel of what should be shared. I searched out Teresa Shannon, and she suggested writing as a way to move forward. She encouraged me to write to identify with each item. Explain my reason for making a piece, why was making it meaningful, how things were interrelated, and my connection to it.

My search started by processing photographs that I intended to use for my show. This prompted the recall of a precious memory of when my great granddad was working in the shop. He was a tinker by nature. He was always finding something that had been discarded. When in reality, it needed a little "tlc"—or what I would call great-grandpa-ingenuity. It was a moment that has stuck with me forever! I remember looking at his hands and realizing that they were amazing! At 80 some years of age, his hands were thick, calloused, and had incredible strength, and yet they could be remarkably gentle with a pat on the back for a job well done. There was a brief moment when time slowed, and reality briefly paused; like time making a statement, "**pay attention here.**" Personally, it was the divine sharing a moment with the earthly. With this, I was left to understand that there was strength,



courage, greatness, and hope held within the human hands (Image 2- 3.) The sense of how



Image 2- 3: Tryptic, Hands at Work, Wendy Connelley, 2009-2017

important the hands are to mankind has deeply impacted me since then. They are an incredible tool. As a maker, our hands are undoubtedly a critical tool. Hands function as an extension of our minds. Our hands allow us to reach out and shape the world that we are in. We can manipulate the materials before us and discover the tactile intricacies of the world.

My grandpa Shike and g'ma-Shaul, my mom and dad, great-grandpa and gg-Sharah, and grandma Clara are all older generations that took the time to teach me the art of making, building, and growing, all working with my hands. They defined the importance of work and usefulness. They instilled the awareness of purpose. They have also been the guiding compass to lead me to follow my spiritual desire to work to serve others. My hands are equipped to serve others. Constructing my pottery to have that same purpose is essential to me. In a sense, it is multi-layered because it has a use, it is a tool, and at a deeper and more meaningful level are the layers of beauty, individuality, and expression. The memories of my family's hands inspired me to create different versions of work gloves.

I began looking up information about this industry that I lived and love. Data and statistics had changed quite a bit from when I studied agri-business 30 years ago. While the agricultural industry

makes up about 4% of the United States population, only 1.3% is actual farmers and ranchers<sup>6</sup>.

Recalling a discussion in an Art History class was that around the late 1800s, the agriculture industry made up a little more than 70% of the American workforce. Countless products and the industries that produce items rely on agricultural yields to contribute to the economy. This means that there are presently around 2 million operations<sup>7</sup> currently running. While this industry appears to be in decline, what I see happening is the families are not necessarily passing down the family estate. The children could never afford the inheritance taxes, and some children do not want to work in a thankless industry. So, the small family ranch is being sold to the neighbor, in instances where the land is next to a city. This is what I have watched happen in Cheyenne, Wyoming, the state's capital. The landowner being imposed on to sell is driven to break up good pasture land into small parcels. These "10-acre" lots are becoming a part of the ever-growing sprawl of cities. The evidence is also revealed in the nearby area of Fort Collins, Colorado. Here the local dairy farm is now 4 miles inside the city limits. Thirty years earlier, it was close to 10 miles from town.

The best thing to happen to small family-sized farms and ranching is the current trend of "farm to table." The current consumers are looking to support the farmers' market over big agri-business. So, as a subtle nod to the 4% in agriculture, I put in 4 common crops that I have worked with, grown up with, or around: hay, wheat, millet, and corn. (the millet-hay from my family's ranch was placed in a pitcher in my exhibition to acknowledge the actual farmers and ranchers.) The display of a bushel of millet models the simplicity and unique shape to be quite stunning in such a subtle way. The magnitude of this small sculpture is to share how much can be generated from a single seed. In

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<sup>6</sup> Sara Lepley, "9 Mind-Blowing Facts about the US Farming Industry | Markets Insider," Business Insider (Business Insider, May 30, 2019), <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/farming-industry-facts-us-2019-5-1028242678>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

my experience of planting and growing crops, this symbolizes a 100-to-1 return. What it can become is also awe-inspiring. While my own family utilizes this crop to feed the cows and sheep, other uses include cereals or birdseed for both wild and domestic.

Opening my journal, I went back through my plethora of ideas. I wanted to focus on functional objects. Looking through, I stopped on some word text and simple sketches from my spring trip to NCECA, National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I sat with a lovely lady from Washington state with whom I had much in common with. She was kind enough to share with me her ideas of wide opened bowls she had made. They were a very loose idea of a bowl, but she laughed when I mentioned how I could see a shovelhead. I quickly sketched some ideas and words to jog my memory later. When looking at my drafted images, I recalled times when with my mother and a shovel in hand, I learned to apply the surge flooding method by changing the dam in the irrigation ditch. The water would flow out the ditch in a fan and water the land below. Later, returning to move the dam, plug the holes, and distribute the water to the next dry area. This “low-tech” method has been around for thousands of years, and this brought to mind the Neolithic images of livestock painted on the walls of caves. This dryland method of spreading water is a skill taught and then passed down from generation to generation.

My trusted shovel and I moved many amounts of dirt. Later in life, that same shovel became an incredible tool for other things. The inspiration came by way of an article at my parent’s home in the local ag magazine, *The Fence Post*, while on the night shift during calving season. This got me to thinking about how others view the same tool that I work with. While researching, I took a chance and reached out to the author and developed an amazing friendship. Charles “Oz” Collins emailed me this story, and my connection with the sentiment and the experience was reflective. I constructed this wall of memories. As best stated by “Oz”:

*“Critical to the successful operation of many farms and ranches, this is a tool of ancient and hallowed traditions. It has come down to us virtually unchanged in form, but its function seems to grow with time and advancing technology. I have, of course, reference to the irrigating shovel. You cannot buy a proper irrigating shovel in a store, and they are increasingly scarce and/or costly at farm or ranch sales. Allow me to describe this tool in its ideal configuration. The handle is worn glassy smooth by the grip and slide of numberless calloused hands. At first sight, the blade may appear to be badly worn. It is not; it is just properly broken in. A good irrigating shovel is never pointy. A pointed shovel is a pain, virtually useless for real dirt moving and worse than useless for weed cutting. Instead, the classic shape of the blade’s edge is straight, or better still, slightly crescent-shaped. Said shape cuts through tough “gumbo” clay more easily, is a marvel at moving ditch sand, and practically seeks out and destroys weeds on its own. The average new shovel requires between three and three-and-a-half years to train and properly shape unless you are shoveling a lot of sand out of cement ditches, then the process may be shortened by as much as a year. A fully broken-in irrigating shovel is as important and versatile a tool as can be found on a farm or ranch. A partial list of its uses includes:*

- *Electric fence tester*
- *Electric fence crosser*
- *Bale twine cutter*
- *Rattlesnake ender...*<sup>8</sup>

For myself, I saw it used more as a ‘bovine attitude adjuster.’ This article was where ***Tools of Versatility*** began to come into being. I started exploring a variety of tools.

In my three years of grad school, there were many nights that I would quietly enter my studio space and ask what do I have to say? what is important enough to display here? In the moments of solitude in the grad studio, my journals filled with ideas and thoughts. By the end of my term, there were six completed sketchbooks to pluck ideas from. Many ideas were recorded in words and some in images to replicate later.

My beginning exploration began with the barn doors and the idea of how the viewer moved about the room. It was a perfect invitation and metaphor. There was a brief moment of hoping to have the sound of a windmill and bawling cows and sheep. Maybe a chicken or two. (If you stand in the room long enough, the vent will kick in, which creates enough sound you can imagine the wind moving

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<sup>8</sup> Charles “Oz” Collins, “The Farmer/Rancher Tool Kit,” TheFencePost.com (TheFencePost.com, April 14, 2006), <https://www.thefencepost.com/news/the-farmerrancher-tool-kit/>.

the blades of a windmill or an engine behind a propeller.) Then recalling science lessons taught many times made me realize that smell is the best thing to trigger memories. The ideas started linking together. In the summer of 2019, everything started clicking like a well-tuned International tractor. Again, sketching out my thoughts had moved me to open dialogue with my committee and instructors. I set a huge goal for myself. My composition began to develop with this body of work. Images needed to be taken, and much work had to be completed for my idea to come to fruition.

I worked my way through five different clay bodies to find what would best represent what I wanted to say through my artwork. This is the same as a painter selecting their canvas or a cattleman selecting the breed of cattle to raise. There are specific traits one looks for. My process started with a cone 6, white stoneware clay body, moving to a Mid-range (also known as cone 6, firing between 2170°F to 2240°F<sup>9</sup>) porcelain, then trying a heavy iron-bearing clay, and buff color clay body that I mixed myself before ending with a speckled buff to use for my thesis project. The granular ilmenite within this clay body was something that I wanted to employ. The ilmenite, when fired, leaves speckles all over the ceramic form. These look like small-specks of rust. I used this to point to the wear and use of a tool.

When a glaze covers this material, a chemical reaction occurs, and the ilmenite bleeds into the glaze. After firing, you can see metal-like streaks—as if the pieces were rusting and showing the aging of use. In my first semester, there was an obscene number of hours spent calculating glazes and manipulating my calculations to get a usable and durable glaze. Professor, Jim Brashear, has told his classes repeatedly to select one or two glazes and get exceptionally proficient. This is excellent advice **if** you have the color that you want. For me, glazing is a dreadful process. It will make or break you.

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<sup>9</sup> Val Cushing and Karen Gringhuis, *Cushing's Handbook: a Compilation of Papers Concerning Glazes, Glaze Calculation & Formulation, Clay Bodies, Raw Materials with Clay Body, Slip and Glaze Formulas, Firing, Pottery Making Tips and Other Useful Information* (Alfred, NY, NY: The author, 1994).

One can have the most fantastic piece of work completed, but a poor glazing job, an inconsistent firing of the kiln, or if the glaze you are using is compromised can ruin a piece in 36 hours. On the other hand, you can have something that you dislike and **surprise**, like a gift, your piece comes out, and you may like it better than ever before.

Knowing that I would need a color pallet to work from and taking Jim's advice, I started the journey to find my colors—only seeking two. How hard can that be? I registered to take Matt and Rose Katz Ceramics Materials Workshop. (A long time had passed since I had been in Teresa Shannon's, Materials class.) With intentions to develop the glazes that would be used for my work. In this class, I was again reminded of where the materials come from and how they are obtained. The thoughts, “know your source,” and “where does everything come from?” were reinforced. I did not get the glaze that I wanted, but I did get a start and worked on tweaking this base into something that would give me a multitude of colors in the next three years. Evidently, I spent enough time working with Matt Katz that he created a series to teach others about making a cone 6 (my work's temperature range) glaze and their materials. I was also honored when I met him and his wife, Rose, at NCECA (that the Student Ceramics Art Guild assisted in sending me to.) To my amazement, he mentioned me and the work that I did in his videos. I am forever memorialized!<sup>10</sup> Oh, to think I

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<sup>10</sup> Soetsu Yanagi, *Unknown Craftsman; a Japanese Insight into Beauty* (Tokyo, New York, London: Kodansha International, 1972).

would always be an “Unknown Potter.” I have already gained some fame (Image 2- 4.)

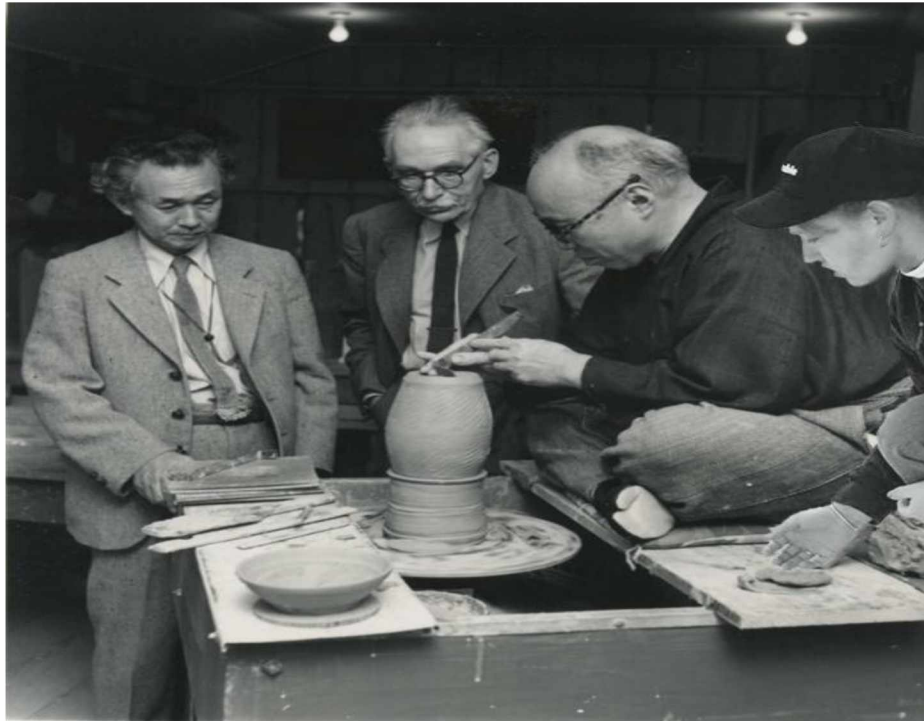


Image 2- 4: *Unknown Potter*—parody, Dr. Yanagi Soetsu, Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada, : Photographer unknown likely—Ken Turner Pottery, (likely 1952) and Wendy Connelley added 2017

I wanted to capture the isolation and difficulty within the ranch life. However, in March of 2020, the college and the nation shut down. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, everyone learned about isolation and the difficulty of life. I decided only to note this point as every person has had to deal with it impeding their life in one way or another.





### 3 | EXPLORE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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#### THE RANCH

I have an absolute love for life on a small family ranch. Experience a slower-paced life where we value connecting to the people, the land, God, family, and a job well done. The community comes together to help each other. You know your neighbors well because they have been there for several generations.

#### ANCIENT ROCK ART

Living life on a ranch near the Colorado river, I would often spend time exploring my world. In this area of Colorado, petroglyphs (Image 3- 1, below) seemed to be everywhere near the river. I had a one-room school K-8 teacher who would spend days researching, drawing, and developing stories about what we found on our adventures out on the school's trails.

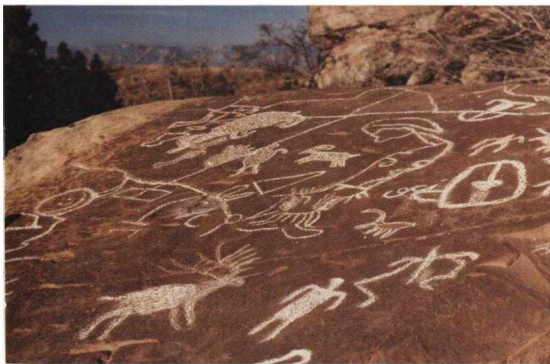


Image 3- 1: Colorado National Monument, Petroglyphs



Image 3- 2: Paleolithic artwork in Lascaux, France

When I taught K-6 art, I too introduced students to the art history of the cave paintings from the Paleolithic<sup>11</sup> age (Image 3- 2) and the many versions of it. It was an encouragement for students that believed they couldn't draw anything but a stick man. I connected with the idea that the people of

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<sup>11</sup> Yongli and Carol Patterson, "Rock Art of Colorado," Articles | Colorado Encyclopedia, October 29, 2015, <https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/rock-art-colorado>.

this time were recording their environment and the animals around them. On a present-day ranch, we are keeping records of our herds also. In some intrinsic sense, the French cave paintings seemed to connect with me. On the cave walls, the documentation identifies the variety of livestock that was being “domesticated” or at least observed by early-man. Our present-day animal husbandry teaches the importance of tracking and identification of each animal on a ranch. This practice is to assist the rancher in tracking the health and wellbeing of each animal. It also traces the temperament of the livestock, which may determine if it is kept or culled. These images directed me to think about my heritage and livelihood and then apply it to my work.

## **GUSTAVE COURBET**

My work process in art parallels the importance of ranch work, the necessary tools, and the need for success in this livelihood. Seemingly everyday items such as buckets, barn wood, nails, farm implements, and even animals are instilled with a feeling of strength, authenticity, and sincerity from their inherent simplistic beauty.

The French Painter, Gustave Courbet, was committed to painting only what he could see. Courbet was the forerunner of the Realism movement as he rejected the academic convention of Romanticism<sup>12</sup>. He was a bit of a Maverick... that pulled at my heartstrings (and hearing Jim call me this from time to time). After reading that Courbet began some of his work by looking at literature, I found this an interesting method and opted to try this myself. Eventually, he abandoned this method and based his work on observing reality<sup>13</sup>. Again, this idea resonated with me. He depicted the harshness of life and, in doing so, challenged modern-day academic thoughts about art. I loved the

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<sup>12</sup> T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Farrell, Jenny. “The Working Class and the Art of Gustave Courbet.” *Guardian* (Sydney). Guardian Publications, June 12, 2019. <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=493201821049882;res=IELAPA>.

idea of how *The Stone Breakers* (Image 3- 3) shows life in action. I am deeply connected to this piece. It could be the tattered clothes, the strength in their bodies, the act of physical labor. This could have easily been my family and me.



Image 3- 3: *Stone Breakers*, Gustave Courbet, Oil on canvas, 64.9" x 101.1", 1849; no longer in existence.

## FREDRIC REMINGTON

As a child, I grew up with the magical connection to this particular bronze piece by Fredric Remington (Image 3- 4) in my grandma's home. Having a horse blow to the right and feeling air



Image 3- 4: *The Rattlesnake*, Frederic Remington, Bronze, 20.5" x 10", 1908

come between me and the saddle is something I have experienced more than once. I know the feelings and thoughts that occurred in the precise moment Remington depicted here. I can fully relate to ‘rattlesnake surprise’ from living in southeastern Wyoming, where rattlers are everywhere. We always had to be on alert and watch for these awful little critters.

## **TERI ROFKAR**

I taught in Juneau, Alaska, for over five and a half years. While teaching there, I worked closely with many artists that were invited into the elementary classrooms. The Tlingit-Haida Nations’ traditions, stories, language, and arts were being brought back into the schools. As a utilitarian pottery maker, I fell in love with the woven baskets (Image 3- 5.) I did not know of Teri Rofkar, specifically, until I



Image 3- 5: Tlingit Basket Weaver, Teri Rofkar, Penn Museum’s American Collection Storage

was in the Native Arts class at UAF. From reading a great deal about her, my research findings stated that Rofkar came into her art profession later in life. My connection to her and her work was immediate. I, too, started my study of art in the “latter” part of my life. I fell in love with her work and the relation to the earth and the materials. There are so many parallels between a weaver and a potter. The reliance on earthly materials she used to make her art is similar to my process. It touches

me that she wanted to share her knowledge with others<sup>14</sup>. I would have loved to have met her. But what struck me most was she was so emphatic about her work being used. One of her berry baskets was commissioned by the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History<sup>15</sup>. My recollection is that she created her berry basket, went out, and used the basket for its purpose—to collect berries, then sent it to the museum. She believed that the “life” of that object was inherently connected to its purpose. This was such a beautiful sentiment that I connected with as a studio potter. I believe that my artworks are to be used, not just set on a shelf to be forgotten.

## **MARILYN LEVINE**

Seeing my art as a reflection and an observance of the self—a consideration of a way of life and an encouragement for other people to ‘stop,’ slow down, and be present. My art pieces become part of the day-to-day backdrop as lives transpire. I was introduced to the style of Trompe l’oeil in an art seminar class. I am employing Trompe l’oeil, a trick of the eye, to illustrate clay’s versatility as a material.

Due to curiosity, my investigation began to search for Trompe l’oeil by ceramic artists. To my amazement, there were several artists. My interests were drawn to Marilyn Levine’s work. She uses clay to mimic leather with absolute precision, creating works with such stunning details. Her sculptures create a “shock-value” because they perfectly replicate the subject. I used this method as a vehicle to explore the concept of use and utility. I learned that Levine believed clay was a medium firmly planted within the craft tradition<sup>16</sup>. She constructs such a likeness of everyday objects that

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<sup>14</sup> Documentary Arts, “Masters of Traditional Arts: Teri Rofkar,” 2009, [http://mastersoftraditionalarts.org/artists/281?selected\\_facets=](http://mastersoftraditionalarts.org/artists/281?selected_facets=).

<sup>15</sup> “Alaska Women's Hall of Fame: Teri May (Laws) Rofkar; Alumnae,” Alaska Women's Hall of Fame: Teri May (Laws) Rofkar (Alaska Women's Hall of Fame, 2008), <http://alaskawomenshalloffame.org/alumnae/name/teri-rofkar/>.

<sup>16</sup> David Kuhio Ahia, “Highlights of the Collection: Marilyn Levine, F.M. Case,” Scripps College, Claremont, California, 2018, <https://rcwg.scrippscollege.edu/blog/2017/03/01/highlights-of-the-collection-marilyn-levine-f-m-case/>.



expresses the utilitarian aspects of the clay. Yet, the case below in **Image 3- 6** depicts something that



Image 3- 6: *F.M. Case*, Marilyn Levine, 1981, stoneware, glazed, 4 3/4 in. x 9 3/8 in. x 8 in., gift of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Marer, Scripps College

is used but elevates the status of common everyday items to a fine art. Levine does this by placing a utilitarian object into a gallery. Levine is playing off of the Found Art movement with the case but her work is not at all. This style of art helped me understand conceptual ideas and how utilitarian works can be elevated into fine art.

## **PETE PINNELL**

I knew that the functional, everyday objects I made were useful. Still, I also see them as art. Even knowing that pottery falls under function, the ‘utility’ can also have an aesthetic aspect. When you look up the meaning of “utility,” the definition better represents a toilet. Turns out, what I am also interested in is the want to express ideas and emotions. By choosing specific textures, my tendency is to communicate tactilely, visually, and experientially. These are all heavily embedded in my work. My interests also lie in the user’s experience. This has always been a curiosity that I have had. Within the correspondence between Pete Pinnell and me, I learned interesting facts about myself and what I was looking for as an artist. I make things that are beautiful, and I make many for specific users. More than that, I am interested in creating a beautiful experience, ‘... in making functional work, the

object becomes a part of someone's everyday life as a 'useful' object—at the same time placing it in a more intimate position and ultimately providing a moment of daily contemplation<sup>17</sup>. This was very important to me, and I struggled to let go of this idea and one that I will return to following this program.

## **RICHARD AVEDON**

In the summer of 2018, seeking yet another avenue, I was introduced to *In the American West, Photographs* by Richard Avedon (Image 3- 7.) He traveled to the western states taking portraits of

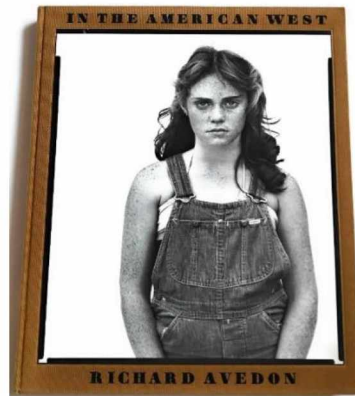


Image 3- 7: Book cover of Richard Avedon's "In the American West"

people to tell his story. I, too, wanted to have my account be about the people of the west. I also looked at the environment from where they came.

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<sup>17</sup> "Asking for A Moment of Your Time, Professor Pinnell," *Asking for A Moment of Your Time, Professor Pinnell*, August 19, 2019.

## ANCIENT JAPANESE KINTSUGI

I made some pieces to purposely look as if to be broken, damaged, or stressed (Image 3- 9) to



Image 3- 9: *Hidden Beauty: Mend the Broken*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics & Baling Wire 2017-2020

demonstrate the connection with the farmer/rancher (Great-Grandpa Sharrah like) resourcefulness.

These pieces have been repurposed for use again. Here, the greatness and hope held within the human hands demonstrated what a critical tool our hands undoubtedly are. With a single thought, the hands find a rhythmic motion to manipulate the materials to mend and make them whole again. Fixing is in our nature. With us helping these items to find a new life—the barn door will no longer be the barn door, but the remaining pieces can function very well as a serving tray. Like the



Image 3- 8: Japanese Kintsugi or Kintsukuroi, "golden joinery," Tea Bowl, 12.2 cm

historical Japanese Kintsugi<sup>18</sup> process of repairing cracked and broken pottery (Image 3- 8, above)

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<sup>18</sup> The Walters Art Museum, "Celadon Box," The Walters Art Museum, accessed May 18, 2020,



and seeing the beauty of what it has become. The people in Agriculture continue to pass the idea to fix/repair what is broken from generation to generation.

## **INSCRIPTION ON CERAMIC WORKS**

I am a religious person. Seldom will you find someone who was born and raised in the ranching industry who is not. Though you may not hear them speak of it, it is there. The uncontrollable circumstances that this life presents, such as drought, flood, a disease in crops and animals, and loss of land, crops, animals, and family members, can be overwhelming to anyone. Those in agriculture rely on faith in the Almighty God to carry us through all hardships. Knowing that God sustains us helps practice acceptance and have the motivation to continue to move forward. I wanted to share positive encouragement with others. I originally wrote scriptures softly on the bottom of my work and glazed over it, so it was known only to me. As my walk with Jesus became more substantial, I began sharing it more openly. I allowed the glaze to break over the impressed lettering or used the underglazes as a semi-resist so the typescript of my handwriting could be seen. I thank Teresa



Image 3- 10: Bowl with Arabic Inscription, From Iran, Nishapur, Earthenware; white slip with black-slip decoration under transparent glaze, 10th Century

Shannon for encouraging me to look at how others have utilized script on pottery. I read the various books in the Ceramics Studio. I have held many conversations with affluent potters that are considered current leaders in the field. I found several bowls from Iran with Arabic Inscription (Image 3- 10.) I selected this particular one for no apparent reason. However, when I learned that the calligraphic decoration on this bowl reads, “Planning before work protects you from regret; prosperity and peace,”<sup>19</sup> I appreciated it even more. The writing’s beauty is enhanced by being shortened, bent, and elongated, transforming the words into an abstract motif. This bowl stands out compared to many of the other ceramic pieces inscribed during the same era. The artful method applied to the lettering and its arrangement on the bowl’s interior draws the eye to the rim. This script creates a horizontal flow around the edge. At the same time, there are vertical flourishes to punctuate the rhythmic intervals.

## CHARLES M. RUSSELL

Life on the ranch is a unique one. We worked hard to make “ends meet,” and there were some exceptionally lean times. I recall my grandma having a card or two of Charles M. Russell’s work (Image 3- 11) framed on decoupaged onto an old wood board that hung on the wall. Never really



Image 3- 11: *Waiting for a Chinook*, Charles M. Russell, Watercolor, 1903

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<sup>19</sup> Ekhtiar, Maryam. “Bowl with Arabic Inscription 10th Century.” metmuseum.org. The MET, 2011. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451802>.

liking his artwork—this one seemed more ‘likable’ than others—possibly because my life was too close to the imagery depicted here. However, with my parents living in Cody, Wyoming, the home to Buffalo Bill Cody’s: Wild West Museum, I spent a bit of time within the walls of this museum and reading about this particular image’s history and the meaning behind it. As the story goes, there had been a severe winter storm. It had been so bad that the cattle froze on the trails, and others were stuck in snowbanks. The owner of the ranch was not there to know, so he had written to ask how things were. The cow boss had to send a letter with a response back. Charles Russell made a sketch. The cow boss included this image as it expressed the situation best. The details are somewhat dim to me now, but the point was quite evident that the situation was dire, and the wolves were circling. After learning the details of this story, its meaning was so much more profound.

Once my show was set up, there was a stronger connection, and I understood the utilization of conceptual art as a tool to tell a story. Remington’s image spotlights that there is more to any account than what you see at first glance. Throughout my show, I used readymade, Trompe l’oeil, and functional wares combined to tell a more in-depth story about a way of life and those using the tools referenced.



## 4 | EXHIBITION WORK

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Culture and environment play a significant role in my inspiration for my pottery's design and aesthetics. Naturally, coming from a life of agriculture, this is what I turned to for this thesis project. As a studio potter, each piece's uniqueness is here to remind the user that it is handmade; not part of our mass-produced world. The exhibit became a way to tell a story.

### **PASSAGEWAY: FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER**

The idea came to fruition as the door is a metaphor for transitioning from one place to another. Working my way through various methods—the opportunity to work with clay in a manner that I never thought of or had seen used before— a NON-Fired process (Image 4- 1.) This process began with me mixing a commercial fireclay body with ten percent PVA adhesive and water. This clay had a different drying texture. Honestly, this caused me to step way outside of my comfort zone and stretch myself, thoughts, and abilities from functional pottery to more conceptual work.



Image 4- 1: *Passageway: From One Place to Another*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics, Epoxy, Wood, Acrylic Paint, 2020

With absolute intention, I placed barn doors at the beginning of my show. As the artist, that is what I am asking of the viewer – to slow down, take pause, and enter this unknown place and investigate what is here. (Refer to section 2 for more discussion.)

## **SOLUTIONS: CULL/KEEP**

As with ranching, there is a time and place where one has to stop and take a critical look at what is right in front of him. The “story” begins at the first display under the show title. What one sees here is a coffee mug (Image 4- 2.) The mug’s three segments allude to the land, a fence, and the sky. An elongated bowl is filled with porcelain cow tags with two cast tags are sitting on the table. Upon



Image 4- 2: *Solutions: Cull/Keep*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics, 2018-2019

closer inspection, you can see that the tags are separated at the neck and apart from the tag’s main segment. There comes a time when a rancher/farmer will have to sort their stock or crops and determine what to keep and what to cull. The intention is to keep the strongest, healthiest, most vibrant, and pertinent animals/crops. As a curator in a gallery with art, I had to decide what to keep and what to remove to show the most vital, suitable, most substantial, and valid work to communicate an artist’s concepts. This develops maturity in an artist and encourages us to improve our practices.



## FROM THE HAND: TIME-WORN & WEATHERED (SERIES)

I sincerely believe that all environments and communities are not that different, even if we want to see ourselves as unique. I sought to tell my story of a life in agriculture to demonstrate the universal connection. This piece consists of three gloves. Here is my first Trompe L'Fonction... trick of the function. From a familiar but ordinary tool, completely utilitarian, (but not really as one is aluminum, one is clay, and one is readymade) and becomes more than what meets the eye by making them a piece of art (Image 4- 3.)



Image 4- 3: *From the Hand: Time-Worn & Weathered (Series)*, Wendy Connelley, Aluminum, Ceramics, Leather and Cotton, 2019-2020

These gloves appear as if casually discarded on a table in between tasks. Throughout my show, you will see several items that are specifically replicated pieces of readymade work. This is the first of this exhibition. Here, I am connecting land, the ranch, and its tools to the ranching life's tenderness and hardships. I am making a connection between the utilitarian object and their wearers. This display points to the life of use and work. I ask that the viewer no longer overlook this everyday object but instead take pause and intentionally focus on this moment, this object.

I see the human hand. To me, the hands depict human ingenuity, growth, strength, and use—all potential for the conceptual ideas at play here. (Referring back to my granddad's story in section 2,) This piece embodies the sense of courage, greatness, and hope all held within his hand.

The first set of gloves (right) are natural leather or “readymade” or “found,” and I am asking the viewer to see this with a different lens. Taking this away from its regular “place” in the world and bringing it to the gallery to be viewed as art. The second (middle) set is a combination of press-mold and hand-sculpted in clay. The third (left) is aluminum cast from a sand mold and dyed with cold bluing and alcohol inks. Each piece indicates the wear on the gloves, their utility, and the wearer (molded to the user’s hand.) To demonstrate the ingenuity and how connected we are to this earth, I chose to use gloves that are well-worn throughout this installation to emphasize the connection—encouraging the audience to be present and ponder the question of usefulness.

### **FROM A SINGLE SEED TO HARVEST**

This “found art” signifies that one small seed (Image 4- 4) may appear to be insignificant. A simple seed can produce a stalk with thousands of new seeds to grow, which is utilized to feed others; just



Image 4- 4: *From A Single Seed to Harvest*, Wendy Connelley, Millet; Found Art, 2019

as the farmer and rancher do. What may not be evident in this exhibition is that I have four crops—hay, wheat, corn, and millet. All are crops that I have used, worked with, or farmed. I determined that this would be my nod to the 4% of the population I referred to in section 2.



## **Awww...SH!7**

Conceptual art was never a direction that I saw for myself. This sculpture started more like a study. I settled on including it because it pushed me toward looking at the relationship between two different things. I pushed back with a specific way of life, the ranch, and what sustains it.

In this installation, I mixed a “readymade/manufactured” article with a piece that I made with an ordinary, functional object that is probably never deemed significant (Image 4- 5.)



Image 4- 5: *Awww...SH!7*, Wendy Connelley, Cast metal, Wood, Ceramics, 2019

I moved in this direction after a long conversation with the artist, Patti Warishina. Her question to me was, “You are looking back into your world. How are you going to bring it to the present times and make it relevant?” After this conversation, my journey started to take a new bearing, and my comprehension of conceptual art began. I will refer back to this point in the section **Tools of the Trade.**

## **TOOLS OF VERSATILITY**

These ceramic shovelheads (Image 4- 6) look just like worn-out, broke-down, used, bent, old, and rusted tools. Each one possesses different marks, dents, and bends and has its own character-marks and story to tell. This points to a life of use. It is a necessary tool to sustain life. I included this piece because it signifies the connection between the object on the ranch and the way of life. Also, this

display of shovels represents how an iconic tool can demonstrate a universal association that any viewer can connect with.



Image 4- 6: *Tools of Versatility*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics, Wood, Nails, 2019-2020

## RIDING FOR THE BRAND

There is a song titled; *You Just Can't See Him From the Road*, that inspired this piece. A branding iron is a tool (Image 4- 7) used to make a mark to identify each animal's owner—a signature of sort just as an artist would sign each piece. It is a permanent mark that provides protection that the animal will



Image 4- 7: *Riding for The Brand*, Wendy Connelley, Iron, 2019

be returned to its owner if it is lost or stolen. The brand also is to protect the rancher's investment. Be cognizant that cows have a mind of their own and sometimes visit the neighbor's place.

## THE MEETING PLACE

The fence (Image 4- 1) identifies boundaries. It separates summer pasture from winter pasture, so stock is rotated to protect the land from overgrazing. It offers protection to the rancher, the ranch land, and the stock.



Image 4- 8: *The Meeting Place*, Wendy Connelley, Wood, Iron, Clay, 2020

On the post are a pair of pliers. A pair of pliers is symbolic of the idea that there are many repairs to do in life. Whether it be an extensive amount of fence to mend or repairs to a personal relationship—working to be a good neighbor, being helpful, and extending mercy and grace with all those we interact with. A healthy boundary is knowing that sometimes you have to cut the fence and knowing when to do so.

Mugs setting on the brace post are indicative of people coming together. Neighbors often work together to brand, doctor livestock, harvest, and the community comes together during a hardship.

Other times they have to meet in the middle to work out issues. At the far end are mugs hanging from a nail, suggesting that there will be another time where they will get together again.

## STEWARDS

The canister set (Image 4- 9) reveals what was grown and harvested from the crops to be utilized by people. Here is an example of a connection between the ranch and the home because we are



Image 4- 9: *Stewards (Series)*, Wendy Connelley 2018-2020

stewards of the land, and we reap a harvest to nourish our family. (Refer to the ideas discussed in section 2.) Through this exhibit, I am asking the viewer to consider the utility present in the practical item and the beauty that it holds and how art is appreciated daily by the user.

## TAPPED RESOURCES: MOTION AT WORK

This radial design (Image 4- 10) is for whatever the viewer chooses to see. I am implying that humanity, the maker of machinery, and nature work together for people to sustain life. It is another

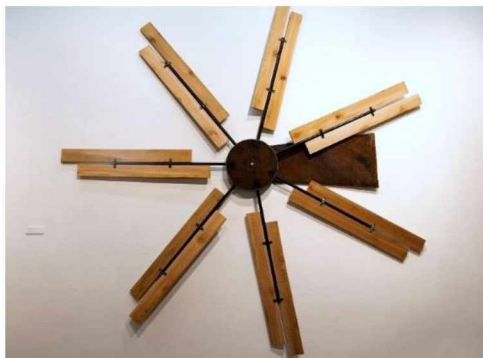


Image 4- 10: *Tapped Resources: Motion at Work*, Wendy Connelley, Wood and Metal, 2019



hint to the cyclical nature of creation, with the knowledge that humans work with the resources available to them. Humanity and the earth are connected, and we rely on each other.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Probably a better title would have been the “Possible(s) Can” like Mary Poppins carpetbag. Who knows what can be pulled out of there, but nothing is thrown out because it might have used somewhere/ some way? In actuality, the bucket is truly a **universal** catch-all (Image 4- 11.) So,



Image 4- 11: *Tools of the Trade*, Wendy Connelley, Clay wood, Baling Twine, 2019

continuing from the discussion in *Awww...Sh!7* to answer Patti Warishina’s question to me, here is my answer: “A 5-gallon bucket. Here is an object of the modern-day but reminiscent of the analogy I was looking at while making this work. It was that every place I have ever been having had a heavily used, beat-up, and tattered, filled with who knows what... 5 –gallon bucket. We love the bucket in every trade.”

## MOMENTS IN TIME: SERVING OTHERS

The ladles hanging under the tin-roof (Image 4- 12) are a metaphor for the fluidity of everyday items



Image 4- 12: *Moments in Time: Serving Others*, Wendy Connelley, Clay, Tin, Wood, Iron, Hay, 2020

being used both in the home and outside on the ranch. Here in the show, we transition from one space to the next—from the tool's intended purpose to a makeshift use of the said tool for the next task at hand. Possibly from using anything from a shovel to a scoop to pull grain to feed the horses, a milk cow, or sheep. Often mom's scoops would find their way out to the feed shed. I recall memories like that of Norma-Jean filling a ladle to serve a crew of hungry people, to serve the community at a large event, and/or to feed the children at school. These are small moments that have left substantial impacts on so many people. One doesn't always need a big tool to make a profound statement—just one little lady offering to serve others. The word SERVE or *1 Peter 4:10*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "1 Peter 4:10: New English Translation (NET)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed October 18, 2018, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/net/1pe/4/10/s\\_1155010](https://www.blueletterbible.org/net/1pe/4/10/s_1155010).

is sprigged, stamped, or written on every piece in my show—Use your gifts to serve others; like Norma-Jean did.

The pottery and meals are so intertwined with each other. There is such a partnership between potters and the need to make wares that people want to use. That enhances the experience of eating and building communities.

Like agriculture, pottery has moments where you do the work alone with long strenuous hours. Then there is the event that requires the community to come together to work and grow those relationships. It's the journey of making in clay as it relates to my heritage of working on a ranch.

### **AT THE CHOPPING BLOCK (SERIES)**

Suggestive that items from the barn or outdoors make it into the house, the same can be said for the tools from the house being pilfered and used elsewhere as a makeshift tool. One can often find mom's favorite scoop, bowl, cup in the barn. For this series (Image 4- 13), I looked at clay's

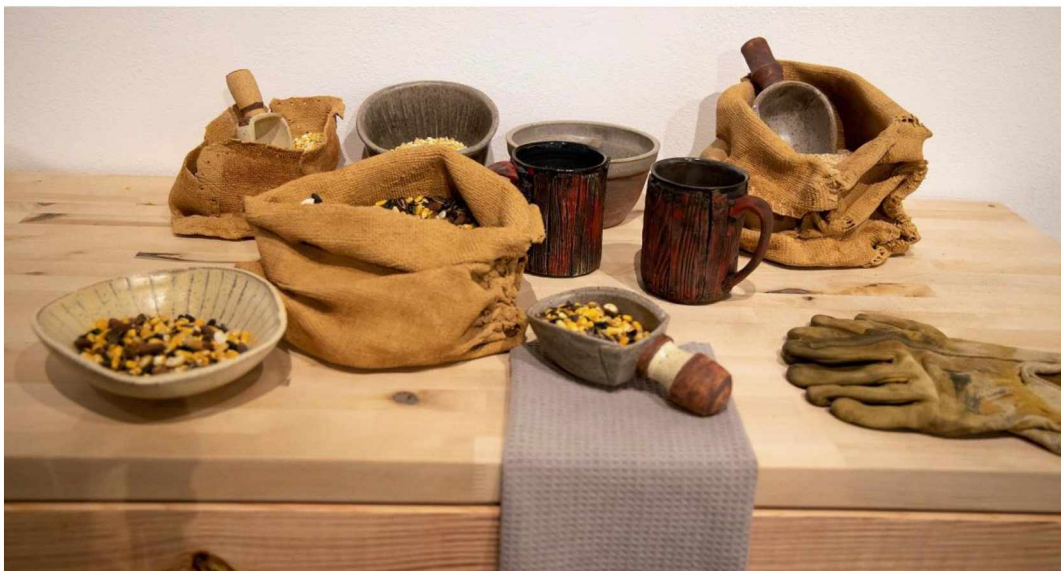


Image 4- 13: *At the Chopping Block (Series)*, Clay, Wood, 2019-2020

distinctive qualities when making the gunny sack and wood. These pieces probably made the most impact on me as a maker. Here, I am not trying to point to the “replication” of the sack or the

wood-mimic on the coffee mugs. I am processing the ideas of recycling, age, wear-and-tear, weathering, and the eroding of a surface. I was questioning the concept of utility and what it means to be useful in an object. I also wanted to invite the viewer to pause and contemplate what is in our world, why it is where it is, and how it is being used.

## **HIDDEN BEAUTY: MEND THE BROKEN (SERIES)**

This group of items has a simple connection. They were broken, worn out, unusable. With a little of the farmer/rancher (Great-Grandpa Sharrah like) resourcefulness (patience and time), these items have found a new life, been repurposed for use again. The barndoor will no longer be the barndoor. But the remaining pieces can function very well as a serving tray (Image 3- **Error! Reference source not found.**) The water vase that sat proudly on the table serving the household drinking water may now be at the sink to store ladles and spoons. Like the historical Japanese Kintsugi process of repairing cracked and broken pottery and seeing the beauty of what it has become. The people in Agriculture have been doing this as a way of life for a very long time out of necessity.

## **GENERATIONS: HERITAGE PASSED DOWN**

The collection here (Image 4- 14) are sets that have all been created to represent the family; not only the nuclear family but also older generations. It is through this connectedness and being tied to



Image 4- 14: *Generations: Heritage Passed Down*, Wendy Connelley, 2018-2020



family that the heritage gets passed down. The items work together, like a family, and this is the aspect that I am indicating.

### **LIGHT OF THE WORLD (SERIES)**

As a historical form, structured with a handle and mouth, a pitcher is used to store and pour liquids. It is also a container and a symbol of human routine and behavior. It is often compared to the female body. **Light of The World** (Image 4- 15: *Light of the World*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics,



Image 4- 15: *Light of the World*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics, 2019-2020

2019-2020) speaks to females' importance on the ranch, and I wanted to denote this. In my opinion, women are relational and are often overlooked, like a pitcher. Repurposing the pitcher by opening its walls allowed the light to pour out. It is a way to be used and to serve others. I want to share the light with those that I come in contact with.

## CYCLICAL: OF THE EARTH (SERIES)

Looking at Image 4- 16, the shovelhead on the lowest pedestal holds a scoop of wet clay. The middle pedestal holds refined clean clay. On the top pedestal is an object used to contain. Within it are shards of broken clay that will be returned to the soil and, with time, repurposed by the earth to once again be useful after it has broken down. This sums up the cycle of life. Everything comes from the earth; we process and utilize it. As with anything, time will break it down and eventually



Image 4- 16: *Cyclical: Of the Earth*, Wendy Connelley, Clay and Wire, 2019

## I CAN TOO

When you exit the gallery, the little canning jars (Image 4- 17) holding the pens for signing the artist's book were created by a ceramic method called casting with molds. I was able to explore such a wide range of tools, techniques, and materials while I was here at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Ceramics Department. I entered the program, focusing primarily on throwing, and I am exiting with an incredibly comprehensive skill set. There is much to look forward to.



Image 4- 17: Process photos of casting jars, Clay, 2019

## VIEW: THE RANCH(ER)

We used a 3-D imaging device to capture my exhibition. You may view it at <https://bit.ly/2Uixj3V> .This is a 3-D tour, using your mouse to guide you around the room to view any item that was showcased in my exhibit. Below is a dollhouse view (Image 4- 18.)

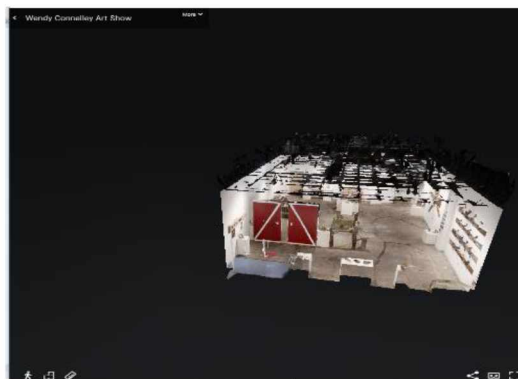


Image 4- 18: 3-Dimensional view of UAF gallery show; <https://bit.ly/2Uixj3V>. The Ranch(er), Wendy Connelley, 2020



## 5 | CLOSING THE BARN DOORS

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The Ranch(er) is an exhibition for my project developed from a primary investigation into my own culture, its icons, and heritage passed down. Through this research, I chose to examine and connect the objects used daily on a ranch, question the idea of use and utility, and our relationships with the tools. To investigate this, I used clay as an allegory throughout my thesis show.

I entered the program with a working vocabulary of ceramic materials, strong fundamental throwing skills, minimal handbuilding knowledge, and a nominal amount of experience with conceptual ideas. I used much of my time working to understand the latter. In three years' time, my understanding of all of these skills has grown immeasurably. I have found connections within a new discipline that I did not see as accessible to me. The primary influence within my work is my connection to agriculture and life on a ranch. However, looking at the artists that inspire my work, there is a common theme; they portray representational objects. It is about what is embodied and has a quality of fact—it is depicted to be relatable to the one viewing the work. People, things, and even attitudes are accurately represented in a way that is true to life to see the situation clearly. While I can appreciate all of the other movements or forms of art, my work is a representational style similar to the artists discussed.

The items that I have chosen as my subjects of study are utilitarian objects, but these items are woven into the cultural fabric of ranchers and their families. These icons or tools serve a purpose. It may be as simple as giving protection, like the durable leather on a glove that molds to the working hand. A shovelhead that is no longer attached becomes a simple dustpan, and the handle is converted into a rod to hold up the vines in the garden. I removed items from their original context and am pointing to more than just the purpose of an object but to the importance of a life of work and use. I referenced everyday utilitarian objects and made general connections between an object



and a way of life. Also, demonstrating a universal association between a variety of trades and demonstrating a variety of artistic genres—more importantly demonstrating connections from the historical Japanese Kintsugi to Modern Art with a play on Trompe L'Oile.

As people of the earth, we work the land because we rely on it—we are interrelated. There is a cyclical progression of people tending the land in order for it to produce products for the people and the repetition of this process. I used ceramics to demonstrate the versatility of one specific type of soil. We have learned a great deal about the earth since the Neolithic people first began growing crops and domesticizing animals. These people first began to feed their own families, and the circles continued to grow with present-day farms and ranchers working to feed the world. We rely on the ingenuity of mankind and the hands that make the work. Throughout my exhibit, I showed the resourcefulness, the importance of work, the necessity of use and function, and the need we have to utilize things within our world. Just as necessary are the hands of those working—without thinking, the hands like pottery are not often at the forefront of our mind. Essential but not thought about, yet the hands function as an extension of our minds. This critical tool is one that I will use to shape the world that I am a part of. As the Great Commission calls on me to do, my hands are equipped to serve. I use my pottery to invite or encourage others with a simple script on each piece.

I processed how my experiences, feelings, and knowledge of a small family ranch point to the bigger picture of our cultural heritage. For the work leading up to my exhibition, I developed and made connections to the many topics that I discussed throughout this paper. I have explored my thoughts and life and where I have been. Using clay as a tool, I expressed other ideas about use with the textures, visual stimulations, and other elements. I understand that I have only scratched the surface here. There is still so much to learn. I intend to continue to grow, search, look and learn. This leads me to consider other places that I have lived—from Nevada's high-desert and basins, the Inside

Passage of Alaska, or even where I currently reside in interior Alaska. Other aspects for me to process would be motherhood and the nuclear family. This project's experience has given me a more in-depth insight into who I am and how to express the ideas about what I am making. I learned how to focus my inquiries. I am still learning how to play, and I still struggle with the concept of failure, even though I believe that is part of the process. I will continue on this path in my home studio.





## 6 | ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Everything I have is a gift from God, and I am grateful and humbled first for this opportunity to grow and mature my walk with HIM. It has been more than just completing this degree; it was about me learning to share the light of Christ and pointing others to seek HIM, eternally grateful for HIS mercy and grace for the moments when I failed.

I am thankful to Jim Brashear for encouraging me to apply to the MFA program.

I do not have enough words and gratitude to give to my family, Clint, JC, MC, and QC, for the endless support, encouragement. The countless times you have assisted me in so too many ways to mention. Having you in my life daily is a blessing! I would have never done this without you all.

Roberta and Steve Trimble for the long-distance calls and endless odd needs sent your way (you did not fail.) Barb-wire or fencing plyers in a suitcase is always a conversation starter at TSA! For demonstrating strength, compassion, Christian morals, and modeling it daily. Last, for all your love, and for raising me to know who I am and where I come from. I am grounded because of you. I am blessed beyond words.

I am grateful to my committee, who generously offered their advice, opinions, knowledge, and expertise. I have always appreciated the time they are willing to invest in their students.

Jim Brashear  
Wendy Croskrey  
Da-ka-xeen Mehner  
Dr. Zoe Marie Jones  
Teresa Shannon  
Madara Mason

The adjunct professors/term instructors and staff, you each willingly spent hours talking to me, encouraging me, sharing knowledge, support, and for believing in me; even when I didn't. I would not be where I am today if it had not been for all that you did for me. I am ever so grateful that you were willing to be both a mentor and a friend;

Teresa Shannon  
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Carol Hoefler  
Matt Katz (Alfred University/ Ceramics Materials)

Angelica Perino. Reminding me to breathe and take this one day at a time and to be the “best me I can be,” along with the endless hours reading and re-reading paperwork with me, and being the best friend I could ever dream of having. I Love you to forever and back.

Lori Price, you have always given such generous support with endless enthusiasm, energy, and organization skills; I would love to have just a little. I love how you look at people and life. Love you so much. You two were always willing to jump in and help whenever I needed it. I hope to always be there for you and your families. I hope to repay your gentleness and kindness one day!

Diane Hunt, for keeping me focused, giving me words, and sharing your thoughtfulness. I will never forget the encouraging words and balloons. You touched my heart

Cora Witt, your words, shared love of God, along with our lunch edits, and late-night chats.

Thank you, SCAG, for the fantastic support you have given me, the friendships, discussions, and willingness to entrust me with various officer positions. Thank you.

The scholarships from Liz Berry and Tom Rohr. For choosing to support the graduates and the arts! I am grateful to Bobbi and Chuck Travis, your encouragement, support, and friendship. Oh, and rocks, really cool rocks!

Sculpture Crew- you all are such a great group of people that I hope to continue to grow the friendships. You make it fun.

My cohort of 2017... This was tough... the extra half a year due to a pandemic. Thanks for the tears and laughter and the uniqueness of each one of you. You all have some exceptional talent and skills.

All of you have helped me in one way or another. I hope to have done (or can do one day) the same for you.

Jenny Chamberlin  
Max Bartch  
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JR Ancheta

LJ Evans  
Theresa Woldstad  
Melissa Steiffel  
Sky Roel  
Xochiyollotl Harbison

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Not to forget anyone who supported me monetarily. It is interesting how such a simple gesture can make such a profound impact. I am humbled and blessed beyond words.

I know that I have missed so many and have not named you specifically. I hope you know how much I treasure you, and all that you have done for me is appreciated deeply!

Lastly, if you made it this far, I beg forgiveness for my colloquial language.

I wish Blessings to you, the reader. May you have peace. Godspeed

-W.Connelley

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## APPENDICES

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### A. IMAGES



Image A-I- 1: *From the Hands: Time-Worn & Weathered (Series)*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics, 7.5" x 8" x 1", 2020



Image A-I- 2: *From the Hands: Time-Worn & Weathered (Series)*, Wendy Connelley, Aluminum, 8" x 8" x 0.75", 2020



Image A-I- 4: *From Harvest to Serve (Series): Berry Bowls*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics with Wire Handles, 7.5"x3.5", 4.5"x7", 2019



Image A-I- 3: *From Harvest to Serve (Series): Coffeepot with Lidded Pour-over*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics with Wire Handles, 7"x 6", 4"x5", 2019





Image A-I- 5: *From Harvest to Serve (Series): Scoop with Millet*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics, 2.5"x4.5"x2.75", 2020



Image A-I- 6: *Morning Routines(Series): Egg Crate*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics, 9"x7"x2.25" , 2019



Image A-I- 7: Process shot for *At the Chopping Block (Series): Medium Gunny-sack and Scoop*, Wendy Connelley, 5.5"x10"x6", 2019



Image A-I- 9: *At the Chopping Block (Series): Small Gunny-sack and Scoop*, Wendy Connelley, 6"x7"x5", 4"x2"x2", 2019-2020



Image A-I- 8: *At the Chopping Block (Series): Large Gunny-sack and Scoop*, Wendy Connelley, 6"x 11"x 7", 7"x 5" 3", 2019-2020



Image A-I- 11: *Hidden Beauty: Mend the Broken (Series): Camp Coffee Pot*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics and Baling Wire, 9.5"x6", 2019



Image A-I- 10: *Hidden Beauty: Mend the Broken (Series): Water Pitcher*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics and Baling Wire, 9.5"x6", 2019



Image A-I- 12: *Light the Way: Lantern & Bucket (Series): Bucket with Handle*, Wendy Connelley, Ceramics and Wire, 10"x 6.5", 2020





Image A-I- 13: Gallery images from *The Ranch(er)* exhibition, November 3-20, 2020. Galley Opening cancelled due to Corona-Covid-19 pandemic.

## B. EXHIBITION ANNOUNCEMENTS



Image 1 MFA Thesis Exhibition Show Card

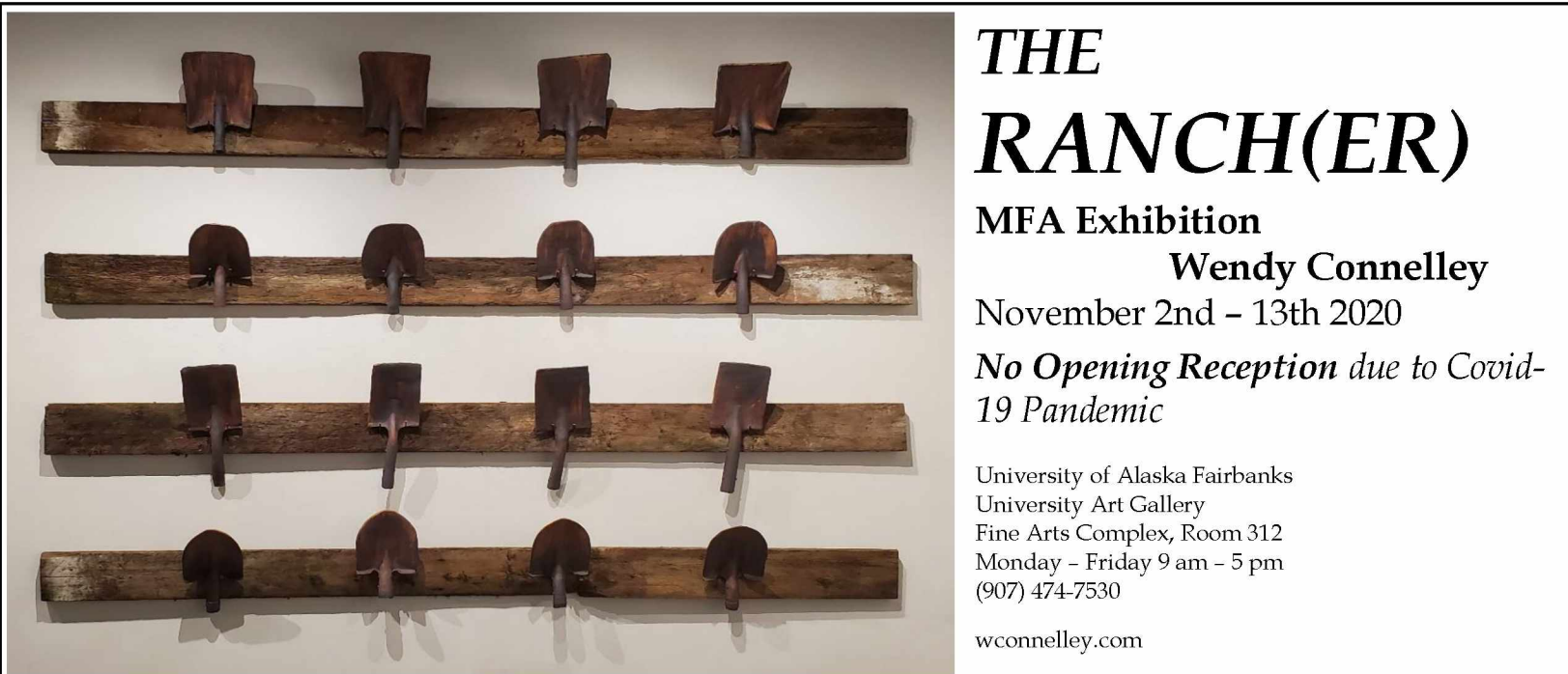


Image 2 MFA Thesis Exhibition Digital Show Card



## C. ARTIST STATEMENT

*The Ranch (er)* is a multi-media installation that alludes to my memory of life on a family-run ranch in the heart of America's West. Here I explore my connection between the land, the Ranch and its tools, and generations of ancestors living and working in the field, the barn, the outbuildings, and the ranch house. I give voice to the seldom-vocal rancher and the isolation, hardships, and tenderness of ranch life. This body of work explores the relationships between artifacts found on my family's Ranch like rusted barbed wire wrapped around weathered, wooden fence posts; a pair of cow-hide gloves, time-worn and weathered; beat-up and dull shovel-heads; and more importantly, the way of life that is sustained by these objects.

The objects I've chosen as subjects for this exhibition are objects that are not only utilitarian but also woven into the cultural fabric of ranchers and their families. They are icons of generational identity. For the rancher barbed wire creates boundaries and protects property. A pair of gloves becomes the rancher's hands, over time, taking on the shape of the wearer, revealing labor, and protecting the hands that do the work. Rather than creating traditional functional objects such as cups and bowls, I've created conceptual pieces that emphasize the intangible connection between utilitarian objects and their wearers, as well as the objects' roles in the culture of their origin.

By removing the objects from their original context, I point to the context itself: a life of use and work. The process of making pottery itself parallels the processes found in ranch work and the tools necessary for life there. Items normally considered to be common or mundane (buckets, barn wood, nails, farm implements, and even animals) are remade as metaphors and, for a moment, become more than the everyday objects that we often overlook. This transformation is a way of intentionally focusing on this world, both for me in the making of these objects and for the audience in the gallery.

Agricultural life is cyclical and interrelated, where everything has a necessary function for sustaining life. This work represents my connection to that cycle and the widespread historical and religious emphasis on the concept of serving others. Like Japanese Kintsugi (the art of repairing cracked and broken pottery to a useful state using lacquer dusted with powdered gold), the community I represent here believes that "if it breaks, you fix it to make it useful again."

Those who choose to Ranch have an intrinsic love for the land and all that dwell on it. I am drawn to the medium of clay because of the tactile connection to the soil. In the words of an instructor I respect, I "talk about dirt using dirt." It seems only natural to use it as a medium to reveal the beauty inherent to these objects. I have intentionally use speckled buff clay. This particular clay has ilmenite added in granular form. Like rutile, it fluxes and breaks the glaze. Ilmenite causes various sized spots to form what looks like rust spots. Where the glaze is thick enough to capture some of that compound, streaks appear. The reference to rust, like the dents and wear patterns carved into the clay, points again to the concept of wear, use, work, and unique beauty. However, I'm not aiming to merely recreate reality. Rather than *Trompe L'Oeil*, my work could be considered a type of *Trompe L'Utiliser*... "a trick of use" or a "trick of function." This body of work invites the viewer into a narrative—a story that asks a question about utility, a moment for meditation on what it means to be "useful," and an opportunity for people to stop, slow down, and be present.

Without further ado, welcome to *The Ranch(er)*.

W. CONNELLEY

## D. ARTIST BIOGRAPHY



Artist-Wendy Connelley, 2019, photo by artist

Growing up ranching in the west, I spent most of my life isolated, working with animals and the land. Pottery felt like a natural choice for my direction in Fine Arts. I grew up in Colorado and Wyoming. This was where I learned to see the beauty found in the rustic items used by my family and the past generations. It is these items that I emulate, draw from, and find patterns and textures for my art. The agricultural lifestyle is a daily reminder of how important life is. My connection to making pottery represents the importance of family, community, nourishing, nurturing, work, and use.

Nevada is where I was first introduced to pottery. I had a significant influence here that taught me that the work is the journey, and the journey is everything regardless of the final piece.

My family moved to Alaska, where I continued to make pottery, and went back to my days on the ranch making art with metal. I revisited my little plasma cutter and welder. Art is my therapy as I have a deep desire to make things. Presently I am working on completing a Master's in Fine Arts focusing on Ceramics at the UAF. I am grateful to God for the opportunities I have been given. I have had people who have encouraged and

pushed my ideas, the beautiful scenery, incredible opportunities, and all that life has to offer in this great land. I appreciate all that UAF has provided me. I am thankful for the support that my family gives me. They have all worked together as a team so that I had the freedom to fulfill a life-long wish. I tip my hat to them. It wasn't always easy giving up their time with "mom/wife."

## E. CURRICULUM VITAE

# Wendy Connelley

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## EDUCATION

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University of Alaska Fairbanks. M.F.A., Art; Ceramics/Sculpture, 2020.

University of Wyoming. BA, Education: K-8, Middle School, Art K-12, 1997.

## EXHIBITION HISTORY

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2020 – **Solo Show**, *MFA Thesis Exhibition: The Ranch*, UAF Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Ceramics and Sculpture.

2020 – **Collective Series**, *Visual Consequences*, UAF Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Ceramics.

2019 – **Juried Show- Image 1-** Juror: J. Jason Lazarus; Society for Photography Education; Northwest, *In Our Own Voices: Culture / Identity*. UAF Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Photograph.

2019 – **Juried Show- Image 2-** Juror: J. Jason Lazarus; Society for Photography Education; Northwest, *In Our Own Voices: Culture / Identity*. UAF Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Photograph.

2019 – **Collective Series**, *Prospects*, UAF Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Ceramics.

2018 – **Collective Series**, *Shifting Surfaces*, Keller Architecture + Allied Art Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Ink drawing.

2018 – **Collective Series**, *In Pursuit*, UAF Gallery, Fairbanks, AK, Ceramics, and ink drawing.

2017 – **Collective Series**, *The Journey is the Destination*, Keller Architecture + Allied Art Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Ceramics.

2016 – **Collective Series**, Student Show, UAF Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Ceramics.

2014 – **Collective Series**, Student Show, UAF Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Ceramics.

2013 – **Juried Show**, Student Spring Show, UAF Gallery, Fairbanks, AK; Ceramics.

1999 – **Collective Series**, Student Show, Great Basin Community Gallery, Elko, NV; Pencil drawing.

1994 – **Collective Series**, Student Show, Great Basin Community Gallery, Elko, NV; Prisma colored pencil drawing.

## COMMISSIONS

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2017 – Ceramics, Keyes Family, Flameware set of 10.

2016 – Ceramics, Williams Family, *Wildlife Serving Set* for 8, Ely, Nevada.

2015 – Ceramics, Rutman Family, *Wildlife Serving Set* for 6, Fairbanks, Alaska.

2014 – Ceramics, Flewelling Family, various wedding gifts.

2008 – Metal sculpture, Currier Family, Juneau, Alaska, *MAJIC\_Sailing Vessel*.

2005 – Metal sculpture, *The Roper*, Elko, Nevada.

2004 – Metal sculpture, Cunningham Family, Cody, Wyoming, *Big Horn Sheep*.

## AWARDS

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2017 – Liz Berry Memorial Scholarship for outstanding art students, University of Alaska Fairbanks

2018 – Tom Rohr Memorial Scholarship for outstanding art student, University of Alaska Fairbanks

2020 – First Gen Forward, recognition for demonstrating a commitment to improving experiences

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

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- 2020 – Instructor of Record, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK (Intermediate Ceramics [responsible for all aspects of the class], Spring 2020).
- 2019 – Instructor of Record, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK (Beginning Ceramics [responsible for all aspects of the class], Spring and Fall 2019).
- 2018 – Instructor of Record, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK (Beginning Ceramics [responsible for all aspects of the class], Fall 2018).
- 2017 – Studio Assistant, Glacier Alaskan Pottery, Fairbanks, AK (Cut, shape, fit, join, mold, or otherwise process materials, researched glaze information, applied finish to wares produced, assist-studio technician).
- 2000-97 – Faculty; K-6 Art Education + Severe & Profound, Elko County School District, Elko, NV.

## **REFERENCES**

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Available upon request

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